NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6283 NOVEMBER 28, 1978
CLAUDIO ESKENAZI

NICARAGUA

ANNCR:

EVENTS IN THE PAST FEW DAYS HAVE ONCE AGAIN HIGHLIGHTED RECENT ATTEMPTS TO MEDIATE THE DISPUTE BETWEEN NICARAGUAN PRESIDENT ANASTASIO SOMOZA AND HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS. VOA'S ESKENAZI HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT:

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PROPOSALS BY A MEDIATION TEAM -- MADE UP OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, GUATEMALA AND THE UNITED STATES -- FOR A NATIONAL PLEBISCITE TO DETERMINE WHETHER PRESIDENT SOMOZA SHOULD STAY IN OFFICE HAVE BEEN REJECTED BY BOTH SIDES. THE NICARAGUAN PRESIDENT REJECTED THE PLEBISCITE PROPOSALS ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT WOULD BE UNCONSTITUTIONAL AND WOULD LEAD TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN UNREPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT. THE BROAD OPPOSITION FRONT, ON THE OTHER HAND, SAID A FAIR VOTE IS IMPOSSIBLE AS LONG AS PRESIDENT SOMOZA REMAINS IN POWER.

THE SANDINISTA GUERRILLAS -- WHO HAD ALREADY REJECTED THE PLEBISCITE PLAN -- WARNED THAT HOSTILITIES WOULD RESUME IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS. BUT PRESIDENT SOMOZA HAS DISCOUNTED THE POSSIBILITY OF A MAJOR INTERNAL OFFENSIVE BY THE GUERRILLAS. HE TOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE ON SUNDAY (NOVEMBER 26) THAT THE SANDINISTAS DO NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT SUPPORT, ARMS OR MANPOWER. AND HE SAID HE BELIEVES THE NICARAGUAN NATIONAL GUARD IS STRONG ENOUGH TO REPEL A POSSIBLE GUERRILLA OFFENSIVE MOUNTED FROM NEIGHBORING COSTA RICA.

U.S. OFFICIALS HELPED SHAPE AN ORIGINAL OPPOSITION PROPOSAL THAT SOMOZA RESIGN IMMEDIATELY AND BE REPLACED BY A THIRTY-TWO-MEMBER STATE COUNCIL THAT WOULD PREPARE THE COUNTRY FOR FREE

ELECTIONS. BUT SOMOZA INSTEAD CALLED FOR A LIMITED PLEBISCITE TO TEST THE STRENGTH OF NICARAGUA'S POLITICIAL PARTIES, WITH A PROMISE TO INCLUDE OPPOSITION LEADERS IN ANY NEW CABINET HE WOULD FORM. THE OPPOSITION REJECTED THAT PROPOSAL.

THE UNITED STATES THEN OFFERED THE IDEA OF A FULL-SCALE PLEBISCITE TO DETERMINE WHETHER GENERAL SOMOZA SHOULD BE·REPLACED BY A GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY. THE PLEBISCITE, TO HAVE BEEN HELD FIFTY DAYS AFTER ACCEPTANCE OF THE PLAN BY BOTH SIDES, WOULD BE PRECEDED BY A SUSPENSION OF MARTIAL LAW AND AMNESTY FOR ALL POLITICAL PRIOSONERS.

DESPITE THESE SETBACKS, THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION TEAM IS CONTINUING ITS EFFORTS TO AVOID RESUMPTION OF CIVIL WAR IN NICARAGRA AND THE POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER TENSION WITH NEIGHBORING COSTA RICA.

JUST LAST WEEK, COSTA RICA BROKE OFF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH NICARAGUA AFTER COSTA RICAN PRESIDENT RODRIGO CARAZO SAID NICARAGUANS CROSSED INTO COSTA RICA, OPENED FIRE AND KILLED TWO MEMBERS OF ITS CIVIL POLICE FORCE. MEANWHILE, SOURCES IN MANAGUA SAY THE THREE-NATION MEDIATION TEAM HAS DETECTED A WILLINGNESS FOR FUTHER NEGOTIATIONS ON THE PART OF BOTH PRESIDENT SOMOZA AND HIS OPPONENTS.

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